

Getting Used to Different

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Summary: "Hiccup had always been small, but even small boys grow up to be men one day." Hiccup finally hits a growth spurt, but things go downhill from there. Growing up was never meant to be this hard, or this awkward. But maybe, in time, they'll all get used to it.

Getting Used to Different

A/N:

I rarely use cover pictures on my stories, but the lovely art you see on this story's icon is a cropped version of a piece, Differences, drawn by my lovely friend Artydesk, who, for whatever reason, likes drawing adorable fanart for my stories occasionally. You can find Arty on tumblr, and she also has a deviantart which under the same username that is definitely worth checking out. I would put links here, but FF will delete it. Use google. Thanks for letting me use the pic, Arty!

Someday I'll actually become a responsible writer. I won't write all of my chapters/oneshots in one sitting, I'll read them more than twice before posting them, I'll get a beta reader and maybe even finish the stuff I start and post when I say I will.

Until then, I'll apologize for the unbalanced flow, strange plot, and typos. Cheerio, dears, and enjoy tonight's ramblings.

* * *

><p>Hiccup had always been small, but even small boys grow up to be men one day. His body had denied him muscle and bulk since infancy, but after growing slowly but surely for years, at the age of sixteen, Hiccup's body finally decided that it was past due for a height adjustment " which is to say, he shot up like a dragon out of a cage. He outgrew his clothes, his prosthetic, and even his bed at

rate that was, frankly, annoying.

Still, there were some perks. Astrid was knocked speechless (with anger or that strange Astrid-brand of endearment, Hiccup would never learn) when he finally reached the point where he could walk up and plop his chin down to rest atop her head. His father slapped him heartily on the back, laughing about how Hiccup had been 'holding out on him' again, as though growth spurts were on Hiccup's personal agenda. The villagers all teased him good naturedly, bragging that muscle would be soon to follow the length on his bones. Girls began looking. Women began looking. Snotlout even felt threatened enough to begin bulking up again.

Apart from them all, Hiccup wasn't sure what to do with himself.

He'd seen it happen enough to know how ridiculous he must look. Usually, boys were thirteen, fourteen, when they hit that stage of puberty where everything was half-soft faces, clumsy limbs, shoulders too wide and hands too big and a voice that cracked so much it hurt. The fact that Hiccup was sixteen, nearly seventeen, when his body finally got the hormonal memo that, hey, maybe the whole broader shoulder thing is a good idea, and maybe not all boys want to be known as the only one under five eight with stubble.

Perhaps the most annoying part of all was the juxtaposition between how Hiccup felt and everyone else saw him. Hiccup felt awkward and embarrassed, and was sure his face was stained from blushing so much. His beard had finally decided to come in more than a feathery shadow, and it made him feel strange when people noticed and did a double-take. He walked with a limp constantly, either from a too-short prosthetic or because he was trying to re-learn how to walk in a new one he'd just made. He hadn't grown accustomed to his body's new boundaries, and was constantly bumping into things. Dragons. People. Weapons. Hiccup was suddenly ten times the clumsy oaf he'd already been.

And yet, no one seemed to notice how awkward he was. Alright, he'd long passed the agony of his voice dropping, years ago when his peers were suffering the same fate. But learning to walk and move with suddenly lanky limbs was hard " especially when one of them didn't grow with the rest. Hiccup had reconstructed his prosthetic leg upwards of ten times now, just to keep up with himself. It was annoying because even the slightest change in height had his left leg limping, and his hips aching terribly from trying to compensate. He'd be at the forge every few days, sometimes welding a bit of extra height to the sole, sometimes melting the whole thing down and starting from scratch. It was maddening, but he put up with it, if only because blacksmithing was something he didn't mind all too much.

People began to treat him differently, and it was weird. After the fight with the Red Death, the tribe had begun to treat him differently, like a hero. They talked with him, nodded at him, smiled at him instead of scowling, and of course came to him for every dragon-related problem. But this, this was different. The girls never came near him anymore, but liked to stand off and look at him, giggling when they didn't think he could see them. Being teased at a distance is almost worse than being teased up close, and it always put Hiccup into a bad mood. The boys his age were almost worse "

especially Snotlout " because suddenly, they didn't look at him as their smart-but-small-and-gimpy friend, now, they tended to look him up and down and scowl at him, like he was some sort of threat. Hiccup thought he understood, but the conflict only put him in a _worse_ mood. Stoick treated him differently, but it almost wasn't as bad, because Hiccup could've predicted such. It was the sort of good-natured nagging and too-hard slaps on the back (that Hiccup was somewhat surprised he could handle better, now) that characterized the rehabilitated relationship between he and his father.

The point where his social life really went to Hel in a handbasket was when he realized that _Astrid_ was treating him differently, too. She didn't punch him as much anymore. She looked almost afraid to go for a peck on the cheek. She was as bossy and hot-headed as ever, but she didn't talk as much, and liked to stare at him and look away when he saw her. She stood further away from him than normal, and when he tried to get close, she'd turn bright red (Ruffnut would often materialize to tease her, and they go off for some girl talk and death threats). Whenever Hiccup to ask her why she was acting so differently, which he had, several times, she would start stuttering and go red again and play with her hair awkwardly, and insist that she _wasn't_ treating him any differently.

So maybe it was his height, his beard, his sudden wide shoulders, his sharper jawline. (Ruffnut had once described that last feature as 'delicious', but every time he remembered the incident, Hiccup's face made a weird, blushing grimace, because he'd always been confused by the twin's passing crush on him.) They'd told him more than once that he'd turned out handsomely, that, thin figure aside, he had nothing to be ashamed of. Snotlout assured him that girls giggling at him was a _good_ sign, that Astrid's anxiety around him was _fun_, that this all was a big adventure in 'becoming a man'. Even still, all Hiccup could see was a knot on his forehead from where he'd forgotten to duck, a leg that always hurt, a village full of people who refused to treat him normally and _not_ comment on his physical growth, and a father who embarrassed him with all his sly looks - even _Gobber_ joined in on that thread. In the odd daydream where Hiccup had imagined himself taller, stronger, more 'manly', he'd always thought it would help him fit in better, gain acceptance. Now, however, for all the attention he was getting, Hiccup felt lonely.

He was glad Toothless was a dragon. The only thing that made Hiccup realize Toothless had noticed his growth at all was how he reacted when Hiccup called him: he'd whip his head around to lock eyes onto Hiccup's chest, then correct himself and look slightly up. After that, it was friendship as usual. As he had so many times before, Toothless became a sort of buffer between Hiccup and the rest of the Vikings. Toothless didn't treat him differently, and refused to even _look_ at Hiccup strangely, even when Hiccup had to reach farther down to pet him, when the Viking's hands became huge and bony, not even when Hiccup tripped over Toothless' tail simply because his line of vision was too high to see it anymore without looking down.

Toothless was Hiccup's fallback whenever he was feeling glum, because a flight across the sky could _always_ cheer someone up. Unfortunately, Hiccup's dependency on the escape that Toothless offered would prove to be his downfall.

He'd outgrown everything else " it only made sense that he'd

eventually outgrow Toothless' saddle as well.

It was the straw that broke the camel's back. For all the internal confusion that Hiccup had been experiencing, he hadn't said much about it. Aside from attempting to interrogate Astrid (to no avail) Hiccup kept his concerns, annoyances, and questions to himself. But then one day, he couldn't bend his long legs up in the saddle anymore, couldn't make his good foot fit into the stirrup, let alone get his fourteenth prosthetic to operate Toothless' tail. For the first time in years, Hiccup was confined to the ground, on Berk, with the entire village, whether he liked it or not.

He snapped.

He'd half-jumped, half fallen out of the saddle and wrenched it off of Toothless (in retrospect, too hard on his innocent friend) and threw it to the ground. Angrily, he'd turned and stormed off into the forest, with every intent to let off some steam with a long walk, maybe a swim. But of course, it had to start raining. By the time he made it back to the village, he was soaked to the skin, and had no desire to go back to his house, so he went to the forge instead. Gobber was away " for which Hiccup was grateful. Hiccup didn't even bother wearing an apron, which he knew was stupid, but didn't care. After a few minutes, he didn't bother with a shirt, either, because the sopping fabric on his skin was itchy and constricting, making him feel even more irritable than before. Truth be told, he didn't know what exactly he had between hammer and anvil, it might've been an injured sword at one point, but it didn't look like much of anything, now. All Hiccup knew was that it was red hot and semi-soft, and that making it spit sparks when he hammered with all his strength gave him a sick sort of satisfaction that quelled his anger, one resounding _CLANG _at a time.

That's how Astrid had found him sometime later, soaked, shirtless, angry, and scowling down at a disfigured sword like it was his personal enemy. She hadn't been meaning to go looking for him, but after the rain picked up, Stoick had found her on his way back to the house, and had asked whether she'd seen Hiccup. He was obviously worried that his son would get stranded in the rain. She'd told him she didn't know, which was true, she hadn't. A while later, she'd seen Toothless scuttle up to the Haddock house, ducking in next to Thornado in the lean-to outside. Hiccup was nowhere in sight. That's when she'd heard the vicious clanging begin echoing from the smithy. She'd gone over cautiously, not quite sure what to expect.

It was dusk, and she couldn't see him very well, but she could tell that he was angry.

"Hiccup?" she called, stepping up to the stall. His hammer hit the anvil and stayed there, and he looked up. When he saw her, his frown didn't leave, and he looked away quickly.

"What?" He asked dryly. She could see that his hair was wet, as were his trousers and his one boot. He'd left his shirt up to dry, and " why wasn't he wearing his apron? She hadn't answered his question, and he'd begun to scowl at her again. She had an unfamiliar, small feeling.

"I-your father was looking for you," she said. She'd stepped under the overhanging roof for shelter in the rain, and felt like she was

invading his personal space.

"Hmm," Hiccup obviously didn't care, and began hammering away at his anvil, no apparent goal in mind.

"Hiccup," Astrid ventured, and he stopped again, and glared up from under his eyebrows. His squared jaw â€" a new development â€" made his face look almost dangerous, and Astrid didn't like feeling so challenged by him. She clenched her teeth against an unfamiliar feeling of intimidation. "Hiccup, what's wrong?" She asked, crossing her arms.

He actually laughed. "Nothing," He spat.

"Hiccup, you look like you're ready to kill someone," she said.

He let his hammer fall with another clang before straightening up to look at her fully. "It's that damned saddle," he burst, tossing his hammer in a gesture to where he'd left Toothless' saddle out, lying in the rain and mud. "It doesn'tâ€" He sighed. "I don't fit in it anymore. Neither does this gods-forsaken leg," he kicked his prosthetic out and turned back to his work, bringing the sword back over to the bellows and slamming in the coals with a wave of sparks and embers. "Nothing damned fits," he grumbled, so she almost couldn't hear, "Nobody treats me normally, I'm making clothes and legs every other day, and now, dad won't shut up, I can't even bloody well fly." He pumped the bellows one-handed, something that he didn't seem to notice, but Astrid was sure he hadn't been able to do not long ago. "And now," His voice was louder, and he glanced up at her, "You come in here asking me what's wrong. Really, I should be asking you that question, asking the whole damned village, because no one around her seems to remember that beneath this disaster of replaceable limbs, I actually am still me." He snatched the sword out of the fire and slammed it down on the anvil so that the tip bent. "But apparently that's too much to ask of a tribeful of brainless idiots, and while I'd love to leave right now and forget that you all exist for spell, I can't." He punctuated the last syllable with a hammer blow.

Astrid found that her eyes had widened, but her stomach felt heavy. Guilt. She knew they'd been treating him differently. It was hard not to. He was Hiccup. The word 'Hiccup' on Berk meant sweet smiles and rounded cheeks, soft arms and a narrow frame that made him seem eternally cute. But now, he was Hiccup, but with wide shoulders and a tall frame, with dark red beard coming in to frame his lopsided smile (although she hadn't seen it, recently) and a respectable amount of muscle coming in, as well. He was becoming a man, and no one could deny it. He was different, and so they treated him differently. But now, listening to his frustration, Astrid forced herself to remember what hadn't changed. He still had that awkward air, the same pensive expression, the same shifting gait because of his leg, the same squiggle that formed between his eyebrows when he was thinking or upset, the same freckles and the same scar on his chin that was now forming a tiny gap in his scruff.

Expression now concerned and guilty, Astrid quietly walked over to Hiccup, and gently grabbed his arm near his elbow. His hammer stopped. He couldn't look at her, and he was glowering, but he could never, would never be able to hurt Astrid, so he didn't try to shove her away.

"I'm sorry," Astrid said quietly. "Hiccup, I know we've been treating you differently. I'm sorry," She said again, somewhat weakly. Hiccup turned to her, his expression hurt and confused, and still a touch angry.

"What is it?" He asked her, desperately, "If everyone thinks this is so great, why can't they just remember it's me?" he asked her.

"It's you," Astrid felt like a hypocrite as she said it, "it's just," she sighed. "Hiccup, it's sudden. They mean well, you know. We're Vikings" they see it as something to be celebrated."

"By treating me like a different person."

"It's not," She sighed. "You're growing up, Hiccup. We all are. Of course they'll start to treat us differently." He looked down, because he knew she was right. Astrid had also been growing as of late. She had a mature feminine figure; strong legs, high cheekbones, and proportions that had evened out nicely (not that Hiccup had been looking, mind you). But Astrid, Snotlout, the Twins, Fishlegs They'd all done their growing slowly, in small increments. Sure, the boys especially had shot up in quick bursts, but nothing like Hiccup. They certainly hadn't been ostracized by their village simply for growing up.

"You never did like doing things in parts," Astrid smirked wily at him. He frowned, so she explained, "Your first dragon was a night fury, your first kill was the biggest sea dragon seen in centuries, and your first battle scar took your leg. Of course you'd have to grow up all in one go." He actually smiled back, and looked down, blushing, but when he looked back up at her, he was frowning again.

"And what about you?" He said it softly, because as mad as he still was, he didn't want to hurt her feelings.

Astrid was on the spot. She looked away. "I don't have an excuse," she confessed guiltily. "Not a good one, anyway. It's just so quick. With how everyone's been acting, and," She looked him up and down, and quietly, secretly yearned for the day when she'd muster up the courage to tell him how he could make her feel, sometimes. She would have to tell him, of course, because Hiccup would never figure it out on his own. But that was a bridge to cross another day. In that moment, she told him, somewhat oddly, "It's just you've become imposing." Impressive was probably a much more adequate word, but it only came to mind afterward.

He stared at her. "Imposing," He repeated incredulously, "...me?!" He pointed to himself, face aghast. Astrid smiled.

"Well yeah." She tucked her hair behind her ear, trying hard not to look at his face, or at his bare chest, and especially not at that reddish chest hair that, for whatever reason, made her want to tickle him. "It's not a bad thing, Hiccup, it's good, really, but just different."

He sighed and looked away, because that was the whole problem.

She bit her lip. She needed a new strategy. Making a decision, she stepped around him and grabbed the thick tongs from the anvil, and carefully took the glowing sword from the anvil to deposit it back at the bellows.

"What are you doing?" Hiccup asked her. She didn't answer, and took down his shirt from where it'd been drying by the hot, smoky exhaust from the fires. She brushed it off, making sure it was dry, before handing it to him.

"Put this on, you'll freeze yourself," She was thinking of the rain. He frowned.

"Astrid, this is a _forge, _it's a bit-"

"Just put it on, Haddock," she shoved it at him.

He put it on.

"Now come on," She stepped around him, "let's get you a saddle that you can fly in. Toothless won't like being grounded, either, I don't think." She wiped her forehead, which had begun to sweat in the heat, and brushed her braid down across her shoulder, a style she'd recently adopted. When Hiccup didn't move, she turned to look at him. He was staring at her with a clear expression, one that she hadn't learned to recognize on his matured face yet, but made her blush. "Well, you're the blacksmith around here. You gonna stand there, or help?"

He snapped out of it, and she thought she saw a small smile beneath that scruff.

So she helped him, mostly in silence, for the rest of the night. The rain continued to pour outside but the warm glow of the fire kept them warm and dry. She helped him draw up designs for the leather saddle, helped him take measurements of his legs and placement of his feet, helped him redesign the metal arm loops and stirrups, the cords and the buckles. As they worked, Hiccup forgot his melancholy and grew overexcited about the changes he could make, the improvements. He made the leather saddle longer on Toothless' back, changed its shape, added two new handles that could move with his swaying in the saddle. After he'd finished the plans, Astrid had helped him pick out the best cuts of leather, and cut them into the right shapes. He'd awled them and laid them out, and they'd been sewing various bits together when Hiccup stopped and got a very blank expression on his face.

"Hiccup?" She asked, leather cord and needle coming to a halt in her hand. No response. "Hiccup, you alright?" She tried to look over to whatever it was that he was looking at, but saw nothing. She studied his face again. "Hiccup?" She called once more. He continued to stare a moment, but then, suddenly, lunged for his sketchbook and pencil.

She smiled and continued stitching, glancing up occasionally at Hiccup to see if he'd come back from his inventive trance. She started looking up at him more and more often, until the needle in her hand stopped moving altogether, and she openly stared at him. He

didn't notice.

His hair was a mess falling over his head, and his freckles glowed in the firelight. His eyes glinted green beneath thick eyebrows, squinting at his paper. Thin lips played with the end of his pencil, and he smeared charcoal on his round nose without realizing it.

This, this was Hiccup, she thought. She really had forgotten that. But beneath the new height and the beard, the shoulders (which she thought were far more defined than Hiccup seemed to believe) the squared jaw and the body that finally matched his deepened voice, there was still that thoughtful, oblivious, eccentric Hiccup. She suddenly realized that she'd missed him terribly, but he hadn't ever left. He'd been sitting by himself, the same but in a different skin.

Setting her leatherworking aside, Astrid came around behind Hiccup to look over his shoulder. She always had trouble deciphering his designs and sketches, but she thought she was looking at a design for a prosthetic leg.

"Is that a leg?" She asked, and he jumped in surprise. He tossed a look over his shoulder, still oblivious to the charcoal on his nose.

"Yeah," He said, glancing down at it. "Iâ€¦ I think I couldâ€¦" he stopped talking and sketched some more. "I mean, it'll beâ€¦ involved. Making it, that is. But if I could get it to work, it would make it easier to control Toothless' tail, not to mention making sure I can actually sit in the saddle rightâ€¦" He trailed off again and continued refining his design. Astrid sat down next to him and watched. She hadn't noticed she'd begun to rest her cheek against his shoulder until his arm moved and her face moved with it. She realized that it'd been a long time since they'd just sat like this. They'd never been an overly intimate couple. She punched him, they hugged occasionally - or at least, they used to. It'd been a while. She wrapped her hands around his elbow and watched his drawing hand with fascination. She'd never told him, but she enjoyed watching how he wrote and drew with his left hand. She looked from his designs of the foot to the designs of the saddle, which he'd drawn atop a charcoal Toothless. After years of flying, Hiccup obviously knew what needed to be changed, improved, removed, and added. It was indeed bigger, and more fitted to Toothless' back, and the fact gave Astrid a thought.

"You think it'll be big enough for two people?" She asked. He paused, and glanced down at her at his right shoulder. His chin brushed her forehead, and she was surprised when the feeling of his short whiskers sent a happy jolt through her stomach.

"â€¦Yeah, I think I can do that." She smiled, but didn't respond, and didn't look up at him. Eventually, Hiccup gave a small smile, and pulled his right arm around to wrap around Astrid â€" it was long enough to do that, now â€" and let his hand rest at her waist. She let it, and something in her wanted to punch him, because she wasn't used to thisâ€¦ cuddling, but she didn't, and scooted closer to Hiccup instead.

They stayed that way for a while, not talking, or moving at all, just

Hiccup sketching and Astrid watching him, being close as a physical apology to the unintentional estrangement she and the others had put him through, just because he'd grown up a bit. Okay, a lot.

She watched the sketches come to life under Hiccup's hand, new equipment that would fit his new body for the same life that he'd always led. He was still Hiccup. And he was different, and it'd definitely take some getting used to, but things would settle down eventually, back to normal.

Besidesâ€¦ As she felt his hand at her waist, his warm shoulder at her temple, his beard not too far from her face, Hiccup's own words from years ago came to Astrid's mind.

I could get used to _it._

End
file.